

FY05 Goal – Recycled-content paper towels

- Replace precision wipes with 100% recycled-content paper towels

Glenn employees were using specially-processed virgin precision wipes as everyday paper towels, to clean desks, as napkins for their lunch, and other non-precision uses. The goal of NASA Glenn Research Center's Pollution Prevention(P2)/Sustainability Committee was to replace precision wipes with a recycled-content paper towel for non-precision uses. This was target number 23 on the P2/Sustainability Committee's FY05 Activities and Targets (Short Term) list.

Glenn employees use about half a million paper towel sheets each year. From anecdotal reports from Industrial Hygiene and the supplies administrators, it was discovered that most employees were using precision wipes for everyday cleaning use. Precision wipes are meant for NASA's technical projects, and are specially processed to be pristine for use on sensitive equipment and processes.

Precision wipes are processed to increase loft, and they are bleached. These two special processes increase the use of chemicals, energy, and water - and release additional toxins into our atmosphere. Precision wipes use virgin timber (sanitary cellulose), versus the 100% recycled content in the (unbleached!) recycled paper towels. Plus, about 5,000 precision wipes cost 210% more than recycled paper towels (\$186 versus \$60). If even 20% of the precision wipes could be replaced with recycled paper towels, this would equate to a savings of \$12,600 per year.

With the help of the supplies administrators in the Logistics and Technical Information Division (LTID), a line item was added to the on-line ordering system for 100% recycled-content paper towels. The P2/Sustainability Committee posted an educational outreach piece on Today at Glenn, including providing notice of the new line item on the supplies-ordering website.

Here is a breakdown of the orders for precision wipes versus recycled paper towels (approximately 6-month periods):

	<u>Wipes</u>	<u>Paper towels</u>
Feb 23 thru July 28, 2005:	85	25
Jul 1 thru Dec 31, 2004:	117	
Jan 1 thru Jun 30, 2004:	159	

Note that these numbers reflect orders, not quantities. But a quick analysis showed that an average order of wipes may be comparable in units to an average order of paper towels (an average quantity of 5-6 units).

Considering that, per LTID, all supplies are ordered less beginning in October each year, the July through December period may be understated for purposes of comparison with the February through July period. But, without adjusting for an understatement for July through December, there was a possible 27% reduction in precision wipe orders possibly attributable to a switch to the recycled content paper towels.

Using the more comparable January through June period, recycled content paper towel orders may have reduced precision wipe orders by 46.5%. (Note that this is not a scientific study, as there are many variables not taken into consideration such as sheet size, number of employees, or number of projects. But, the bottom line is that employees are ordering much less of the precision wipes since the recycled-content paper towels have been offered and ordered.)

As an added benefit, there are more paper towels on a roll than there are precision wipes in a box. So, one order of paper towels can offset the purchase of about three boxes of precision wipes.

Note that using paper towels on a roll instead of in a box, and having more sheets per unit, reduces the cardboard being used. This means no full-sized box container, and less of a "holder/container" per product.